



# Problem Gambling, Gambling-Motivated Crime & Gender

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# So, what do I mean by “Gambling-Motivated Crime”?

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- Primarily **non-violent, financial crimes** that are committed in order to pay off gambling debts and/or continue gambling
  - While there may be some problem gamblers who commit other types of crimes, the prevailing type of offense by problem gamblers are **acquisitive (or monetary)** in nature (Adolphe et al., 2018)
- The most common types of gambling-motivated crimes are embezzlement, larceny, theft, robbery, and counterfeit currency
- Most often committed against **family, friends, or employers**
  - Are seen as crimes of **trust**
- Gambling is the second most frequent motivation for serious fraud prosecutions

This has been supported by a recent Meta-Analysis  
of all studies of gambling-motivated crime

“...gambling related crime is likely often a product of gambling itself,  
intended to accumulate further funds to gamble, recoup financial  
shortfalls, or conceal the individual’s gambling from others”

(Adolphe et al., 2018, p.410)

### Crime and Gambling Disorders: A Systematic Review

A. Adolphe<sup>1</sup>  · L. Khatib<sup>2</sup> · C. van Golde<sup>1</sup>  · S. M. Gainsbury<sup>3</sup>  · A. Blaszczynski<sup>3</sup> 

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“the gambling-crime relationship  
cannot be explained by financial  
motivations alone” (Adolphe et al.,  
2018, p.410)

## Why problem gamblers commit gambling-motivated crimes:

Gambling produces a cycle of addiction wherein gamblers acquire debt from gambling and must then gamble to earn money to pay off these debts while remaining stuck in this pattern and unable to desist resulting in gambling-motivated crimes



# Prevalence of these crimes

- Among gamblers seeking help for their addiction, studies consistently reveal that **approximately half of gamblers seeking help** self-report commission of a crime to keep gambling and/or pay off gambling debts (Binde, 2016; Blaszczyński, McConaghy, & Frankova, 1989; Zorland et al., 2008)
- The **more severe the gambling addiction**, the more likely the individual will commit a gambling-motivated crime (Zorland et al., 2008)
- As many as **two-thirds of the most severe compulsive gamblers** commit crimes (Blaszczyński, McConaghy, & Frankova, 1989; Lesieur, 1998; Zorland et al., 2008)
- Majority of people committing gambling-motivated crimes face **no criminal sanctions**

- Majority of people committing gambling-motivated crimes face **no criminal sanctions**
- Significant changes regarding gambling motivated crime in the **DSM 5**
- Removal of “commission of illegal activity in order to gamble or pay gambling debts” as diagnostic because it is a **natural progression of the disorder**

## Convictions (N=195)





Borrowing money to gamble is the largest predictor for commission of crime by a problem gambler (4x more likely)

Which Crimes are Most Likely to Lead to Conviction?

Embezzlement (8x more likely) or taking out a credit card in someone else's name (5.5x more likely) are the biggest predictors for arrest & convictions

(Other types of gambling-motivated crimes are much less likely to result in arrest/conviction; however, that does not mean a client will not be accused, arrested or convicted for such crimes.)





# Issues in the Criminal Justice System

Understanding  
problem gambling

Do not assess for  
gambling  
problems

No understanding  
of G.A.

Not treated like  
other addictions

Lack of diversion  
programs/courts

Lack of  
programming for  
problem gambling

Often high  
restitution that  
cannot get paid

Correctional  
personnel not  
trained

More severe  
sentences

Gambling within  
jails/prisons

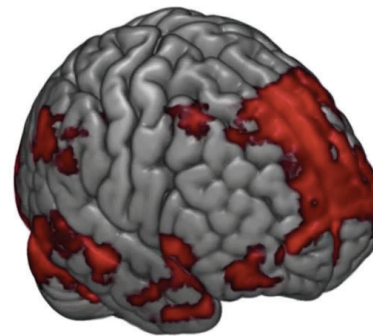
Lower chances of  
employment

Develop into  
problem gamblers  
in prison

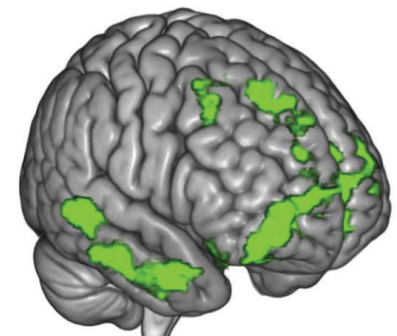
Often clients want to know WHY they committed a crime as it was not in their “nature”

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Consider explaining how problem gambling addiction affects the brain:

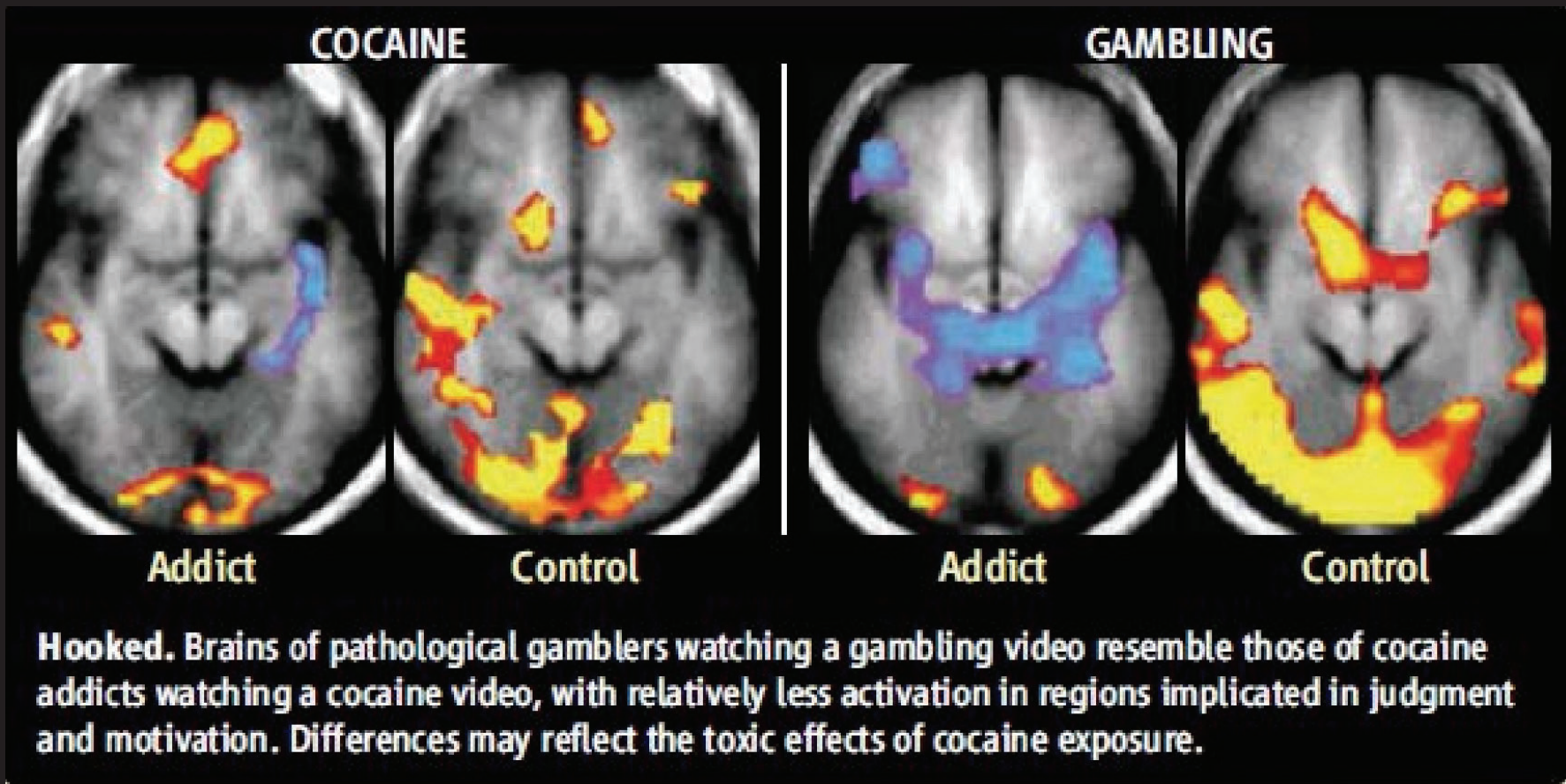


**Problem gamblers' brain response to gambling photos**



**Healthy control participants' brain response to gambling photos**

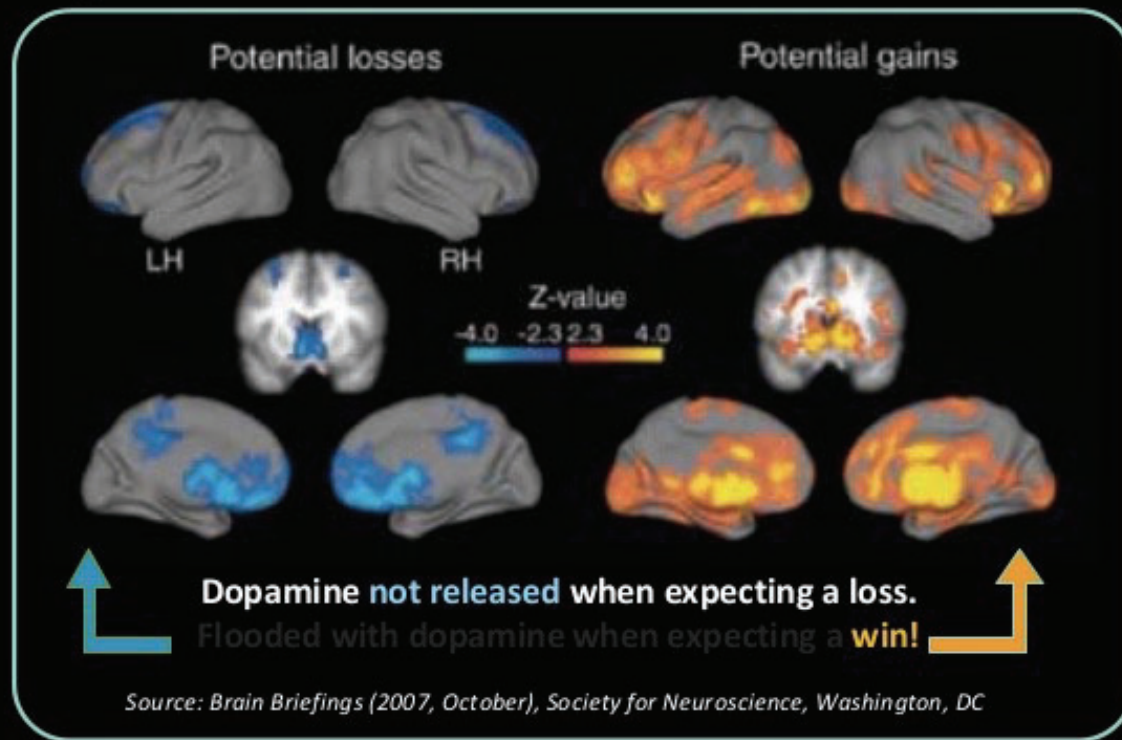
Centre for Gambling Research at UBC (2017)



Holden (2010)

## Gambling & Dopamine

It's not about the money – it's about the action of the game and the hope of winning.



“Several similarities between drug abuse and gambling effects on one’s brain and responses given by brains of several addicts to many cues. Gambling and drugs activate reward systems in the brain in a similar manner.”

“People with addiction disorders have underactive reward systems in the brain. These people choose other ways for stimulating reward pathways that include gambling and drug-fueled highs.”

“20 percent of gambling addicts attempt suicide, the highest percentage of all addictions” (Hedges, 2019).

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Always assess for suicidality, as it is likely that those that commit a gambling-motivated crime are also more likely to be considering suicide...

